

Senator Harry Reid

SPECIAL REPORT

Western Nevada

Western Nevada encompasses Carson, Churchill, Douglas, Lyon, Mineral, Storey, and southern Washoe Counties. The region diversely mixes urban and rural communities and features some of the fastest-growing parts of the state – from the biggest Little City in the World to the rapidly reemerging Ghost Town of Dayton. It also boasts the state capital and one of Nevada’s most precious treasures – Lake Tahoe.

I thought you might be interested to learn about some of the initiatives I have been working on to promote economic development, expand and improve health care, support education, enhance the environment, and improve transportation services throughout the region. I am strongly committed to improving the quality of life of western Nevada’s communities.

Improving Health Care Services

I want to make better health care available to every Nevadan by cutting costs, improving quality, and expanding access. I would like to share with you a few initiatives that I have been working on to improve health care in western Nevada.

I recently held Medicare Town Hall meetings with seniors throughout the state, including in Reno, Carson City, Gardnerville, Dayton and Virginia City, to discuss their questions and concerns about the new Medicare prescription drug bill. Some seniors had questions about the complicated new discount card and even more expressed concerns that they might have worse coverage under the new bill. Concerns like these are why I have redoubled my fight to give seniors the drug coverage they really need, to cut prescription drug costs, and to strengthen Medicare. I support legislation that would ensure that the savings from the new discount cards go to seniors rather than big drug companies. Americans also should have the right to realize the cost savings from safe, imported prescription drugs, and Medicare should be empowered to negotiate lower drug prices on behalf of America’s 40 million seniors.

I have been working to

improve rural health care. I secured \$500,000 for the Nevada Rural Hospital Partners telemedicine program in Reno to enable them to use better technology that will help bring telemedicine to a greater number of rural Nevada communities. When this program is fully implemented, thousands more rural Nevadans will be able to consult with doctors in Reno, Las Vegas, and around the country without leaving their local hospitals.

Additionally, I have been fighting to improve Nevadans’ cancer care, including securing millions of dollars in federal funding to help create the Nevada Cancer Institute. This leading edge cancer center will conduct research and provide treatment for Nevadans so they don’t have to travel far away for care.

I also have been working with the Fallon community to conduct independent research into the possible causes of the cancer cluster there. I secured \$12 million to fund Fallon’s new state-of-the art drinking water facility to remove arsenic from area drinking water. Before the facility opened this past April, I helped to provide safe bottled water to children at area schools.

Expanding Educational Opportunities

As someone whose life was transformed by education, I am strongly committed to providing a high quality education to all of our children. I have been working to secure Nevada’s fair share of federal funding, and I was pleased to be able to secure \$1.3 million last year for the University of Nevada, Reno. It is also critical that the doors to UNR and other great universities are not blocked by financial barriers, which is why I have strongly supported the Pell Grant, the Perkins Loan program, and other federal financial aid programs.

I recognize the unique educational challenges facing Nevada’s rural communities. During a meeting earlier this year with school superintendents from around the state, I heard that rural counties desperately need new school buses – so I introduced a bill that will pay 75 percent of the cost of new buses for rural school systems.

It is also important to expand computer access for rural students. Students increasingly need computer skills to compete for jobs, but rural schools often do not have access to high technology. I was glad to secure more than \$420,000 in funding to supply laptop computers

to Hawthorne Elementary/ Junior High School and Schurz Elementary. These computers are available for students to use at school and at home and will ensure that these Mineral County students have the skills to succeed in our increasingly technologically-based economy.

Economic Development

Throughout my career, I have fought to maintain a prime engine of Nevada's economy – gaming. As Nevada's Gaming Commissioner in the late 1970s and early 1980s, I worked to rid the industry of crime, making it more attractive to tourists and Nevadans alike. As a senator, I have protected casino workers' tips from increased taxes, worked to repeal industry taxes, and supported programs to train new workers.

It is critical that federal government policies help – not hinder – gaming. In 2003 when the Administration was poised to impose a doubling or tripling of federal taxes on casino workers' tips, I worked with Senator Ensign to block the plan. Subsequently, the casinos negotiated an extension of the current tip-tax system, avoiding an increase in taxes. When a proposal in the Senate to repeal the excise tax on Indian gaming gained steam, I made sure to amend the proposal to repeal the same tax for our casinos. That helped ensure that this tax benefit was enjoyed across the board and not limited to tribes.

I also have been a leading advocate of the Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program, which helps ensure that our local governments are fairly compensated for losses to their tax base that result from the presence of federal land

in their communities. This program provides assistance to local governments to provide critical services to their citizens and gives them the resources to invest in their economic future. Last year, I helped secure \$70,000 for Storey County, nearly \$200,000 for Douglas County, \$1.6 million for Mineral County, and \$4.3 million for Churchill County.

Protecting Nevada's Rich Natural Heritage

Our state has a rich natural heritage that must be protected for the enjoyment of current and future generations of Nevadans. Among Nevada's most beautiful treasures is Lake Tahoe. It promises visitors wishing to hike, ski, or fish an experience unmatched by any other setting in the nation. Senator Ensign and I secured \$50 million last year to help restore Lake Tahoe to its fabled clarity.

I also have worked to save Walker Lake, one of only six freshwater terminal lakes in the world and an essential economic hub for Mineral County. I have helped provide millions of dollars to reverse the Lake's falling water levels and increasing salinity. I also have provided substantial assistance to the Lahontan Basin Project, which helps ensure safe and dependable drinking water for Lyon County and will support the continuing operations of the Lahontan National Fish Hatchery.

Transportation Investments

The large size of our state and the rapid growth of Reno and Las Vegas demands that we invest strongly in our airports to accommodate increased traffic and improve service. That is why I have steered millions of federal dollars to

finance improvements at the Reno-Tahoe airport and have secured additional assistance for our state's smaller airports, including Minden. Our air transportation system must remain modern and safe.

It is critical that we invest in public transit to reduce congestion in our cities and expand transportation options throughout our rural communities. I secured over \$6 million last year to invest in Reno's bus system as well as an additional \$1 million for the Bus Rapid Transit Services on Virginia Street in Reno.

I also appreciate the transportation challenges facing rural communities throughout northern Nevada. I strongly support rural transportation programs and secured \$900,000 in last year's Transportation Appropriations bill for rural transit – on top of the \$2 million I secured for such programs the previous year. This funding will both invest in rural transit infrastructure, including bus facilities and vehicles, and help defray the costs of service to rural Nevadans. I also secured separate funds last year to help commuters in Carson City, Gardnerville, and Minden reach jobs in high-employment centers at Lake Tahoe and Stateline.

